

Message Text

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CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

DOCOSOUTH FOR CINCSOUTH

C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0311

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, MT

SUBJ: SIXTH FLEET VISITS

REF: STATE 057643

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY HAS KEPT UNDER CONTINUING REVIEW QUESTION OF WHETHER AND/OR HOW TO BROACH SUBJECT OF RENEWED SIXTH FLEET VISITS TO MALTA WITH PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S GOVERNMENT. WE RECOGNIZE CLEARCUT ADVANTAGES ACCRUING TO US IF MINTOFF'S STRONGLY ANTI-FLEET VIEWS COULD SOMEHOW BE CHANGED. UNFORTUNATELY, AFTER AGAIN EXAMINING CAREFULLY CURRENT LOCAL ATMOSPHERE AND INDICRECTLY PROBING FOR ANY INDICATIONS OF CHANGE IN MINTOFF'S THINKING, WE CONCLUDE THAT ANY DIRECT APPROACH RE RENEWED FLEET VISITS AT THIS TIME WOULD BE TURNED DOWN FLATLY AND PROBABLY BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. HAVING IN MIND OBVIOUS BENEFITS TO USN OF RENEWED SIXTH FLEET VISITS TO MALTA, AMBASSADOR HAS IN RECENT WEEKS FLOATED TWO TRIAL BALLOONS, BOTH OF WHICH WERE QUICKLY SHOT DOWN IN FLAMES BY THE GOM. FIRST SUCH ACTION AS CONVERSATION BETWEEN AMBASSADOR AND MALTA'S AMBASSADOR TO THE US, THE UN AND EC
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JOSEPH ATTARD KINGSWELL, WHO IS ALSO A CLOSE POLITICAL

CONFIDANT AND SENIOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISER TO MINTOFF. USING AS A PEG A RECENT STATEMENT IN THE PRESS BY A MEMBER OF THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION WHICH REGRETTED THE LOSS OF INCOME TO MALTA CAUSED BY THE TERMINATION OF SIXTH FLEET VISITS, AMBASSADOR ASKED ATTARD KINGSWELL WHETHER HE COULD ENVISAGE ANY SITUATION DEVELOPING WHICH MIGHT BRING ABOUT A CHANGE IN MINTOFF'S STRONGLY NEGATIVE VIEWS ON SIXTH FLEET VISITS TO MALTA. WITHOUT A MOMENT'S HESITATION, AK RESPONDED THAT HE COULD NOT RPT NOT FORESEE ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WHATEVER WHICH MIGHT ALTER THOSE VIEWS, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS FIRM AND IRREVOCABLE.

3. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, AMBASSADOR SEIZED UPON THE PENDING EVACUATION FROM MALTA OF A HOSPITALIZED USN SEAMAN IN AN ATTEMPT TO HAVE HIM TRANSPORTED TO NAPLES BY A USN EXECUTIVE-TYPE AIRCRAFT FLOWN FROM EITHER NAPLES OR SIGONELLA. SEAMAN HAD BEEN CHARGED IN 1971 WITH THE MURDER OF A MALTESE PROSTITUTE BUT HAD BEEN FOUND TO BE INSANE BY THE MALTESE COURTS AND THEREAFTER INCARCERATED IN A MALTESE MENTAL HOSPITAL. OUR BASIC ARGUMENT WAS THAT SINCE NEITHER WE NOR GOM DESIRED ANY PUBLICITY CONCERNING THE SEAMAN'S EVACUATION FROM MALTA, WE THOUGHT THE SIMPLEST AND SUREST WAY WOULD BE VIA A QUICK TURN-AROUND USN FLIGHT TO THE RAF PORTION OF THE AIRFIELD HERE. GOM ATTORNEY GENERAL MIZZI, TO WHOM AMBASSADOR MADE HIS APPROACH, ACCEPTED THAT THIS WOULD BE BEST WAY OF AVOIDING PUBLICITY AND SOMEWHAT NERVOUSLY AGREED TO PUT SUGGESTION TO MINTOFF. WE RECEIVED AN IMMEDIATE AND VIGOROUS NEGATIVE RESPONSE: "NO USG MILITARY AIRCRAFT OF ANY KIND." AS SOME ADDRESSEES AWARE, RAF THEN CAME TO OUR RESCUE AND EVACUATED SEAMAN FOR US. THIS INCIDENT IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE FACT THAT MINTOFF CONTINUES TO ADHERE TO HIS VERY STRONG VIEWS CONCERNING US MILITARY PRESENCE OF ANY KIND HERE, HOWEVER, BRIEF, EVEN IN THIS CASE WHICH COULD LEGITIMATELY HAVE BEEN DEFENDED ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS AND OF MUTUAL ADVANTAGE TO THE GOM.

4. EVENTS OF THE PAST SIX MONTHS, AND OUR CLOSE MONITORING OF MINTOFF'S STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS, HAVE TENDED TO BEAR OUT EMBASSY'S VIEWS THAT THERE IS NO LIKELIHOOD OF CHANGE IN MALTA'S FOREIGN POLICY TURN FROM THE WEST TOWARD RAPPROACHMENT WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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THE THIRD WORLD AND ESPECIALLY THE ARAB STATES. THIS "NEUTRALIST" POLICY IS REFLECTED AS WELL IN MALTA'S CONSISTENT VOTING PATTERN AGAINST OUR POSITIONS IN THE UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA. ATTARD KINGSWELL HAS TOLD AMBASSADOR ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT MINTOFF IS IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED TO THIS PATH AND CONVINCED THAT IT IS IN MALTA'S BEST INTERESTS. MINTOFF FEELS "LET DOWN" BY THE WEST, NOT SO MUCH IN TERMS OF AID RECEIVED, BUT RATHER IN THE INVESTMENT AND TRADE

FIELDS.

5. WITH THE CURRENT RECESSION REPORTEDLY HITTING THE FREE WORLD MUCH HARDER THAN THE BLOC NATIONS, MINTOFF IS LOOKING MORE AND MORE TOWARD THE LATTER FOR TRADE AND INVESTMENT ASSISTANCE. HARDLY A WEEK PASSES WITHOUT A VISITING DELEGATION OF SOME KIND APPEARING HERE FROM RED CHINA, NORTH KOREA, THE ARAB STATES, OR ONE OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. ENGAGED IN A VIGOROUS ATTEMPT TO MAXIMIZE MALTA'S EXPORTS, MINTOFF IS CONVINCED THAT THESE NATIONS ARE MORE LIKELY TO TAKE MALTA'S SMALL DRIBBLE OF EXPORT PROEUCTS THAN WESTERN COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY SINCE THEY CAN DO SO ON IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS ALONE AND NOT BE INHIBITED BY THE SAME ECONOMIC FACTORS MOTIVATING WESTERN BUSINESSMEN. THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS HERE, PRIMED BY A VIGOROUS GOM PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORT TO JUSTIFY THIS POLICY, IS FULL OF PRAISE FOR MINTOFF'S EFFORTS. AT THE SAME TIME, THESE SAME NEWSPAPERS CONSTANTLY COMPARE THE PRESENT POLICIES IN A VERY FAVORABLE LIGHT WITH THOSE OF THE PREVIOUS NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS OFTEN PORTRAYED AS "SELLING OUT TO THE FOREIGNERS" (I.E., THE BRITISH) AND "TRYING TO TURN MALTA INTO A SIXTH FLEET BROTHEL."

6. STILL ANOTHER AND EQUALLY IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THE LARGE AND GROWING CHINESE AND LIBYAN PRESENCE HERE. EVEN IF THE SOVIET FLEET, IN ADDITION TO OURS, WERE PERMITTED TO UTILIZE MALTA'S FACILITIES (A COMPROMISE WHICH MINTOFF THEORETICALLY MIGHT FIND POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO PRESERVE HIS NEUTRAL STANCE), IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW MINTOFF COULD SELL THIS TO HIS CHINESE MENTORS OR TO QADHAFI, MINTOFF'S OFTEN STATED GOAL IS TO RID THE MEDITERRANEAN OF BOTH SUPER POWER FLEETS, AND, VIEWED FROM HRE, WE THINK IT IS MOST UNREALISTIC TO EXPECT ANY CHANGE IN THAT POSITION, PARTICULARLY AS WE APPROACH A GENERAL ELECTION IN MALTA SOMETIME IN THE NEXT EIGHTEEN MONTHS. CONFIDENTIAL

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DESPITE THE FACT THAT MALTA COULD CERTAINLY USE THE ADDITIONAL INPUT OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE THAT RENEWED SIXTH FLEET VISITS WOULD BRING, WE BELIEVE MINTOFF WOULD FIND IT IDEOLOGICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO AGREE TO A RESUMPTION OF THOSE VISITS UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

7. AS THE BRITISH FORCES HERE BEGIN THEIR OFFICIAL DRAWN-DOWN IN APRIL 1977, WITH A TARGET COMPLETION DATE OF 1979, IT IS AT LEAST POSSIBLE THAT MINTOFF WILL BE FORCED TO THINK AGAIN BECAUSE OF OVERRIDING ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS. FACED WITH A LOSS OF SOME 30 MILLION MALTESE POUNDS ANNUALLY NOW CONTRIBUTED BY THE BRITISH PRESENCE HERE, SOME MALTESE EVEN IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES BELIEVE THAT MINTOFF MAY SEEK A FACE SAVING MEANS OF KEEPING THE BRITISH FORCES (OR POSSIBLE OTHER NATO ELEMENTS) IN MALTA BEYOND 1979. THIS, OF COURSE, MAY NOT BE

WELCOMED BY LONDON, EVEN THOUGH NATO WOULD PRESUMABLY WANT TO CONSIDER SUCH A DEVELOPMENT VERY CAREFULLY.

8. REALISTICALLY, IN LIGHT OF THE VARIOUS FACTORS SET FORTH ABOVE, WE BELIEVE THAT ANY REQUEST BY US AT THIS TIME FOR A RESUMPTION OF SIXTH FLEET VISITS TO MALTA WOULD BE MET WITH A FLAT TURNDOWN. ANY SUCH DIRECT REQUEST ON OUR PART WOULD ALSO RUN THE RISK OF HAVING THE QUESTION BECOME AN ISSUE IN THE COMING ELECTION. IN THE LONGER TIME FRAME, THERE ARE SOME HOPEFUL SIGNS. MINTOFF'S STRONG VIEWS ON THIS QUESTION ARE NOT, IN OUR JUDGMENT, SHARED BY A MAJORITY OF THE MALTESE POPULATION. INDEED, THE SIXTH FLEET HAS LEFT BEHIND HERE A LEGACY OF GOOD WILL AMONG THE POPULATION AT LARGE AND CERTAINLY AMONG OPPOSITION MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. SHOULD THE NATIONALISTS SUCCEED IN DEFEATING MINTOFF'S L&94 0-456 8, 5#3 :9.8,& 3)3:589,, THE PICTURE WOULD CHANGE DRAMATICALLY. BUT RENEWED SIXTH FLEET VISITS IN THE INTERIM, IN OUR JUDGMENT, ARE JUST NOT IN THE CARDS.SMITH

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